

ROTHERHAM METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

1. Meeting:	Cabinet Member for Children and Education Services
2. Date:	10th November 2014
3. Title:	Social Worker Recruitment & Retention Report
4. Directorate:	CYPS

5. Summary:

Any Local Authority's capacity to deliver safe social care services to children and families is based on a foundation of a filled, settled social work staffing establishment. Where social work vacancy rates increase, Local Authorities can become trapped in a cycle of agency use driving more practitioners out of local authority employment and placing staffing budgets under increased pressure as the premium cost of agency social workers spirals.

In Rotherham, we have over the last 3 years maintained a consistently low vacancy rate, with our outturn figures for 2013 reflecting a 4% annual vacancy rate, against an average of 8% in the Yorkshire & Humber region and 14% nationally.

Interestingly, our turnover rate for the same period was 11%, against a Y&H average and all of England average of 12%. This suggests that whilst we continue to see healthy turnover in our social work workforce – in line with industry averages - the systems we have established around recruitment and selection means we reduce this impact hugely. Rotherham had the highest number of new starters in 2013 when compared to stat neighbours, and had a 3% agency rate - lower than our reported annual vacancy % - which is the second lowest figure when compared to stat neighbours, 4% lower than the Y&H average and 9% lower than the whole England average.

6. Recommendations:

- a) That Cabinet Member receives this report for information

7. Proposals and Details:

The quality of child protection social work practice and overall service provision are manifestations of the workforce we employ to exercise the Local Authorities statutory duties. Around the time of our 2009 OfSTED inspection, Children & Young People's Services had a frontline social work vacancy rate in excess of 37% of establishment posts, and more than 1 in every 2 team manager posts were also vacant. This led to a spiralling demand for agency staff, which comes at significantly higher cost than establishment employees, and without the same controls over quality assurance of practice. This created a perfect storm for reduced retention rates and increased vacancies: by virtue of being employed on a higher salary than establishment (LA) staff, agency social workers created ill feeling and resentment in the remaining establishment workforce; resentment increased given the variable quality of agency social workers on a higher hourly tariff (sometimes double that of employed staff), and this festering disquiet led to more staff leaving to go to agency. Thus the cycle repeats, and the problem grows.

Running parallel to this issue is the shortage of experienced social workers moving throughout the employer market. Note: that isn't the same thing as there being a deficiency in *qualified social workers*, which is often the reported issue in national media. To the contrary, every year HEIs across the country churn out thousands of newly qualified social workers. What there isn't in the region, and indeed across the country, is a high volume of experienced children's social workers with post-qualifying experience of 3 years or more moving across employing organisations. Indeed at Rotherham MBC, some of our longest serving staff across the whole council are social workers who have been employed for ten years or more, and in specialist service areas such as Fostering and Adoption, turnover is close to 0% each year, as it had been for a long time. It is the pressures of frontline child protection and child in need social work that leads to "burnout" for children's social workers, though "burnout" itself can be expedited quickly by organisational dysfunction.

In the face of incredibly testing budget reductions, CYPS has maintained a strong commitment to preserving infrastructure to ensure we have a fully staffed establishment workforce with minimal use of agency. Children's social care outturn figures for 2013 released by OfSTED show Rotherham CYPS had a 4% annual vacancy rate, against an average of 8% in the Yorkshire & Humber region and 14% nationally. Interestingly, our turnover rate for the same period was 11%, against a Y&H average and all of England average of 12%. This suggests that whilst we continue to see healthy turnover in our social work workforce – in line with industry averages - the systems we have established around recruitment and selection means we reduce this impact hugely. Rotherham had the highest number of new starters in 2013 when compared to stat neighbours, and had a 3% agency rate - lower than our reported annual vacancy % - which is the second lowest figure when compared to stat neighbours, 4% lower than the Y&H average and 9% lower than the whole England average.

Whilst the national benchmarking data is published annually by the DfE (last published in March 2014), a review of turnover during the last 18 month period up to and including October 2014 shows that our turnover rate has increased slightly to 18%. However, this is calculated by working out the turnover % against only the frontline social worker establishment - therefore not including other roles in our social work workforce (such as Fostering, Adoption and specialist roles in the Safeguarding Unit). If we included those roles, which likely other LAs will in their data submissions, our turnover rate over the last 18 months decreases to 13.4%, and for the whole department of Safeguarding, Children and Families (which is the "whole system" of service providers in and around children's social work), the turnover rate for the past 18 months is 10.18% . By virtue of creating supernumerary posts in our establishment, we also have an establishment vacancy rate at 0% currently (indeed, when the supernumerary posts are factored in, we have a negative [positive?] vacancy factor). Following a spike in contacts to children's social care in September 2014, additional agency staff have been utilised to augment our establishment, whilst an independent consultant reviews the resource allocation to respond to demand at the "front door". The same consultant is also reviewing caseload management in the long term teams, to assess whether the current establishment supply is relative to service demand.

With regards to sickness absence rates, SCF is at 8.96 days per fte which compares to 8.26 for CYPS as a whole and 7.93 days for the Council. Whilst the count for the department is higher than the whole Directorate and whole Council figures, this is not reflective of a huge variance, and sickness absence is monitored closely by Team and Service Managers, with supernumerary appointments providing cover where long term sickness is an issue.

Anecdotally, there is a lot of positive feedback coming from the social work workforce. The lead Service Manager for recruitment is contacted several times a week from potential new employees querying about job availability, and the monthly recruitment and selection exercises continue to see a healthy number of candidates apply. The only deficit is one that has been prevalent in the region for some time: a lack of experienced workers moving around employers. We do however invest in effective support for Newly Qualified Workers, and our retention rates for NQSWs is very high indeed. Feedback also from NQSWs is that they enjoy working in Rotherham, and that whilst the job is challenging, they feel well supported. This sentiment was fed back repeatedly by HMI during the September 2014 OfTSED inspections.

Cabinet member receives a bi-monthly report on social work workforce at the Joint Briefing session.

8. Risks & Uncertainties

Having accurate benchmarking data is always problematic, as every Council will qualify their workforce in different ways, dependent on their structures and management portfolio configuration. Even down to the definition of the social work

workforce, % data for turnover and sickness can vary significantly dependent on whether figures relate to the wider social work function (i.e. including fostering, adoption and "specialist" services such as Safeguarding Unit and Practice Consultants) or whether figures are purely related to "child protection" social workers (and in itself, does that include Looked After Children services, if a Council has a dedicated service, or not?). Notwithstanding these uncertainties, Rotherham's current data maps comfortably to those published benchmark figures, and the anecdotal evidence we have to augment our empirical data provides assurance to members that social work recruitment and retention has not- to date - been adversely affected by the recent high profile media negativity surrounding Rotherham MBC.

This report is based on Rotherham's historically calculated establishment for children's social workers, and is not reflective of the view of OfSTED in terms of workload capacity and caseload allocation. The relative positives of this report should not undermine the need to assess workforce capacity when considered with desirable/appropriate case work allocation.

9. Finance

There are no financial implications to this report.

10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications:

- CYPP 2013 -16 & Workforce Strategy
- LSCB 3 Year Business Plan
- SC&F Social Work Standards & Development Strategy

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